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ABSTRACT

Gadsden Independent School District (GISD) in rural New Mexico sought alternative funding sources to meet student needs in the areas of early childhood education, special education, at-risk programs, and partnership programs with communities and local colleges. Although this school district has been granted funds for many of its projects, unforeseen problems have emerged, including hidden costs and teachers perceiving special projects as additions to teaching loads. This indicates the need to establish a policy and procedure plan before grants or requests for funds are written. Drawing on GISD's experiences, this paper discusses: (1) reasons for seeking alternative funds; (2) current social issues and subject areas for which funding is available; (3) the funding search process, including the need to train district staff and administrators as proposal writers or create statewide networks of proposal writers; (4) developing a district or statewide grant writing procedure for optimizing school district planning and projections while meeting funding obligations and controlling hidden costs; (5) community partnership and team building; (6) building a grant writing team and writing the proposal; and (7) incorporating current social issue programs into regular education curriculum by meeting basic competencies, not increasing teaching loads. (LP)

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Use of Alternative Funding by Rural Schools for Supplemental Programs Which Address Current Social Issues and Special Education Needs

THE PROBLEM

As state governments have found it necessary to reduce funds available for education due to a waning economy, many schools and school districts find themselves with increasing needs and decreasing resources. This problem has faced rural schools, frequently due to a sparsity factor and especially in special education programs, for almost a decade (Lockwood, A., (Ed.), 1991; Pine, et al, 1991; Helge, 1989; Helge, 1983; Marrs, L., 1983).

One option educators have is to look to alternative funding sources for the resources to meet students' special needs. Current social issues are often supported by specialized agencies or organizations that have particular interests in given areas. An example of this is the Health Promotion Bureau, Injury Prevention and Control Section, Violence Prevention Program of New Mexico which recently advertised for Violence Prevention Projects throughout the state.

One rural district, Gadsden Independent School District (GISD), responded with a Gang Intervention/Prevention Program. GISD has responded to its communities' and students' needs by seeking funding for early childhood programs, day care programs and expansion of the same, vocational education, transition programs, and partnership programs with communities and local colleges.

While GISD can draw on in-house proposal writing expertise and has experienced success in funding many proposals, some small rural schools may not have the in-house expertise needed for accessing external resources (interview with Dr. Jack T. Cole, March 3, 1993). The same difficulty faces GISD that many small rural schools face. The persons who have grant proposal writing skills have other duties which make it difficult to apply much time in seeking funding sources and writing proposals (interview with Dr. Jack T. Cole. March 3. 1993). Because of these gaps of time and skills, most private foundations', states', and federal funding go to larger school districts because they have access to professional proposal writers, often employing

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individuals whose sole responsibility is to prepare proposals for funds to serve areas of need in Special Education or to address pressing social issues.

EXAMPLE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

As a rural school district in New Mexico in the 1991/1992 school year, GISD was facing a unit decrease in per pupil funding. Witb increasing numbers of students and growing building and capital needs, as well as no salary increase for the staff in the last three to five years, this funding decrease added to an already strained budget. As solutions to this problem were sought, teachers and administrators increasingly looked for other sources for funding.

Several innovative grant proposals were written by the Director of Special Education, Special Education teachers, and diagnosticians. Several proposals were also written by the Director of Elementary Curriculum and Instruction, her staff members, and Administrative Interns from New Mexico State University (NMSU). Some of these innovative programs include: Mano en Mano (Hand in Hand), a project designed to provide comprehensive, one-on-one, in-home child development services to families with infants from birth to two years; Manitas Unidas (Little Hands United), a two to three year old Day Care program which includes typically developing children as role models; Greenhouse Burrito Company which serves the high-school vocational/special education population; El Retiro de los Artisos (The Artists Retreat), serving developmentally delayed adolescent students in a week-long summer artists' retreat; El Alma del Valle (The Soul of the Valley), an expansion of Mano en Mano which includes regular meetings of parents and trainers at a central site; Lectura y Technologia en Ruedas (Lectures and Technology on Wheels), addressing literacy for children at-risk; and Circulo del Culturas, Carreras y Idiomas (Circles of Cultures, Careers, and Languages), a program designed to offer Spanish, French, and Portuguese languages to district students for the promotion of multi-culturalism.

As the school district has been granted funds for many, but not all, of these projects, unforseen problem areas have emerged. This indicates a need for a policy/procedure/PLAN to be in place before grants or requests-for-funds are written. It does not indicate the cessation of seeking alternative funds, since they are important in answering specialized needs. But it does indicate a need for school districts, especially rural districts, to be aware of some of the subsequent responsibilities school districts may own, once funding is granted. Some grantors either request or imply a continuation of programs or projects they fund by the grantee picking up the cost and responsibility and carrying on with it.

Some of the costs include: hidden costs to the district in the form of providing housing and/or administration of the project; a need to evaluate it and to disseminate information regarding success or lack of it; an obligation to

expand a project throughout the district; and indirect costs which include employer benefits, and as previously mentioned, continuing the program after the initial funding terminates.

Another area of difficulty has been that teachers perceive the special projects as additions to teaching loads. In some cases, this may be true. However, given current social issues, these may be integrated into a regular curriculum in Science, Social Studies, or Health, updating the instructional information, meeting students' current needs, and meeting basic competencies in one or more of these subject areas. Ways to integrate special programs with established competencies could be examined for each project or program proposed.

THE PROPOSAL

The purpose of the presentation is to discuss and/or illustrate:

1. reasons for seeking alternative funds:
2. current social issues/subject areas for which funding is available;
3. the funding search process, including the need to train staff and administrators within a school district or even in state-wide networks of proposal writers;
4. developing district and perhaps even state-wide grant writing procedures for optimizing school district planning and projections (and state departments of education) while meeting funding obligations with grantors and controlling hidden costs;
5. community partnership/team building.
6. building a grant writing team and writing the proposal;
7. when programs are funded, incorporation of current social issues programs into regular education curriculum by meeting the basic competencies in Social Studies, Science or Health, therefore, not increasing teaching loads.

<u>DISCUSSION:</u>

I. Reasons for Seeking Alternative Funds:

As each rural or suburban school district is unique, reasons for seeking alternative funding will be varied and even multitude. For the purposes of this discussion, these may include some of the following: drop-out prevention: gang violence intervention/ prevention; abuse prevention. substance and/or other: programs for gifted/talented students, including gifted special education students: transportation needs due to distances: teen pregnancy; cultural diversity and/or language differences: improving science and/or math instruction;

technology instruction: distance education; inclusion or mainstreaming programs; early childhood development programs; and professional development programs, to name a few.

II. Current Social Issues/Subject Areas for Which Funding is Available;

It will be impossible to list all topics, but the following are a few of general interest (Marchiony, 1991):

> minority women and girls; low income persons; women studying science or mathematics; ethnic minorities; technology for low economic areas; youth with special needs; early childhood education; parent involvement programs; encourage careers in engineering and computer science, and broaden access among women, minorities and the disabled to careers in engineering and management; solutions to the dropout crisis; community collaboration; enlisting parents as partners; bilingual vocational training; study of American pluralistic heritage; growth initiatives for teachers; teacher recruiting and preparation for science, mathematics, and engineering; and areas including English, Language Arts, Foreign Languages, International Studies, History, Social Sciences, Management, Mathematics & Computing, Science, Technology, and many more.

III. The Funding Search Process:

A. PLANNING -

The funding search process does not start with the search. For an effective project or program, the first steps must begin with strategic planning of the program and the organization necessary to achieve it. The careful planning-ahead process may have some of the following:

Step 1 - The Problem
- a. identifying the problem(s);

Step 2 - Diagnosing
- a. assessing the needs:
  - i. time frame;
  - ii. resources needed;
  - iii. person(s) responsible;
  - iv. target population;

Step 3 - Approaches
a. establishing goals;
b. determining objectives;
c. considering alternatives

Step 4 - Taking Action
a. deciding on a course of action;
b. implementing the action;

Step 5 - Documentation/ Evaluation
a. documenting the results of the program;
b. evaluating the results;
c. disseminating and/or expansion of program, if successful;
d. discontinue, if not successful.

Upon presenting this information at a state-wide conference recently it has become evident that the planning may need to start BEFORE the proposal-writing team is formed at the site or building level. It may be necessary to train personnel of small rural school districts before anyone can start addressing a given project.

B. HOW TO FIND FUNDING SOURCES -

A good place to start looking is the local library, in government documents. Ask the librarian to let you see the funding sources directories. If you are close to a university or college, they will be able to help as well. Each department may have a funding source library concentrating on that particular discipline.

The U. S. Government has document depositories all over the nation. These are frequently located in university or college libraries. One is located at New Mexico State University in Branson Hall, the "Old" library. There are usually two or three depositories in each state.

Another source of information is The Foundation Center Cooperating Collections Network, where free funding information is available (see Addendum A). This library-like service makes grants and funding source information available throughout the country through over 180 cooperating collections centers. Catalogs of directories and guides are also available at these centers. It is possible to purchase one's own funding information library from the Foundation Center of New York City. The resource volumes can be purchased by calling (1-800-424-9836), but these cab be expensive for many small rural school districts. *The Grantsmanship Center Whole Nonprofit Catalog* is available free of charge to staff of nonprofit and government agencies by writing

P.O. Box 17220, Los Angeles, CA 90017, located at 1125 W. Sixth Street Fifth Floor, Los Angeles, California, phone number (213) 482-9860, FAX (213) 482-9863.

A subscription to *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* may be purchased by writing to 1255 Twenty-Third Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20337.

IV. Developing District Grant Proposal Writing Procedures for Optimizing School District Planning and Projections While Meeting Funding Obligations and Controlling Hidden Costs;

In an interview with Catherine Provine, Assistant Superintendent of Business and Finance, Gadsden Independent School District, February 9, 1993, the following points were discussed :

"It is critical that the grant proposals funded meet the goals and objectives of the district so that the budget will reflect those goals", Ms. Provine stressed. In order to assure this, during the process of developing the program and its organizational plans, it is important to "work with the budgetary people". It is best to make every effort to have the line-items of the proposal budget match the line-items of the district budget. If the proposal budget is standardized to the district budget (like-items), then, should it be funded, everything would be "ready to go".

It is important that the proposal writing team work closely with the financial staff. Whenever possible, proposals should address indirect costs when allowed by the grantor, to help defray administration costs of the grant. The team needs to be willing to perform the administrative end of the grant as well as writing the proposal, or locate someone who is willing to do so.

It is also critical that the contact person for the grant in the district share all the information received from the grantor with the financial staff. This will help to avoid unpleasant surprises such as financial reports "which were due yesterday". The financial staff must be aware of the reporting requirements up front.

Regarding personnel requirements, Ms. Provine recommended that as the planning progresses and the needs are identified, that the team create the job description for each position required to make sure that it fits into the established salary schedule(s).

A poorly planned grant can actually cost more than it gains for the district and can undo goals, objectives, and policies that the district has worked hard to establish (interview with Catherine Provine. February 9, 1993)

Rural districts may have to work harder at planning ahead. Planning and communication among district staff is essential. It is easy

to become self-environment-oriented, and it is more difficult to have a district-wide perspective because of isolation due to distance, forgetting the needs of the rest of the district when one's own school's needs seem so immediate. It is harder to see the "global picture" from a site-based perspective.

Also, since many grantors have application dead-lines, one of the hard parts may be waiting for another year, when the timing is right. The temptation is to patch together a quick program, without proper planning, just to beat the deadline.

The importance of planning and communication cannot be over stressed. It can make the difference between a successful program or a patched-together substitute. A global view of where the organization is going is needed.

V. Community Partnership/Team Building

For optimum success of innovative programs in the schools, it is wise to take every opportunity to encourage the community served by the school to "buy into" the program. Ownership of the program is thereby shared and commitment is strengthened. In small and rural communities, the school is frequently the only social structure or center in the community.

Involving the community organizations and leaders takes careful and diligent public relations. This may take time to build. The emphasis on teamwork may be an important approach and focusing on the project, goal or need. Diplomacy in smoothing difficulties between personalities and counteracting power plays will be needed. At all times, the focus must be on the ultimate goal, that of serving the needs of the students, and thereby, the future of the community.

VI. Building a Grant Writing Team and Writing the Proposal;

Once someone becomes aware of a need in their field or area of responsibility, that individual discusses it with others at their school site. Several persons may take the idea to the building principal or site supervisor for discussion and/or to prepare a goal statement.

The principal or site supervisor authorizes and assists in forming and developing a team for planning the project or program. [This is a good time to get community members involved. Community members are a rich addition to the skills base of the team.]

During the planning, the team begins locating a funding source and writing the grant proposal. Some of the skills this group may need are:

a. background in, or willingness to research, the area of need;
b. grant writing experience or knowledge of where to get it;
c. funding source identification knowledge;
d. willingness to communicate with administrative departments and populations that will be impacted by the program;
e. willingness to volunteer the time and effort involved in seeing the project through to the finish;
f. select/elect a person who will be responsible for seeing the proposal through the process to completion and approval;
g. important steps to follow in the writing process:

1. follow the format/procedures required by the Request for Proposal (RFP) which is received from the prospective grantor;
2. proposal applications should include:
   * the authority of the applicant;
   * priorities, needs, strategies identified and addressed;
   * the population to be served described;
   * the geographic impact;
   * goals, objectives, and project activities;
   * evaluation design;
   * replicability and/or dissemination of product;
   * and previous years funded if appropriate.

g. the proposals should be submitted in typed form (hard copy) and possibly on a computer disk.

h. *"The final Request for Funding Proposal (RFP) should be reviewed by:*

1. the building principal or site manager;
2. Curriculum and Instruction (CID) (for final editing);
3. Personnel, if applicable;
4. Business and Finance; and
5. Physical Plant, if applicable;
6. Central Management Team; and finally
7. The School Board.

Review may take the form of initials from levels indicated in 1 through 5.

[Grantsmanship Seminars are available from the Grantsmanship Center. 1125 W. Sixth Street. Fifth Floor. P.O. Box 17220. Los Angeles. CA 90017 (213) 482-9860.]

VII. When programs are funded, current social issues programs may be incorporated into regular education curriculum by meeting the basic competencies in Social Studies, Science or Health, therefore, not increasing teaching loads.

A close examination of a district's current curriculum in the Science, Health or Social Studies, viewed from an assessment point of view (Pollard. 1991) may help restructure these subject areas. An example may be:

For the Social Studies Goal:

1. The students will learn to order their world in ways that will help them find personal meaning and become good citizens,

the Center for Dispute Resolution *Mediation in the Schools* program curriculum could satisfy the competency.

For Adolescent Health competencies, the Latino Family Life Education Curriculum Unit, *La Sexualidad* may serve more appropriately for certain localities in New Mexico. [This series contains four units, *Cultural Pride, La Familia,* and *La Communicacion,* which precede the sexuality unit, and may be suitable for other competencies of Social Studies or Health.]

CONCLUSION

Many rural schools can benefit from applying for alternative funding for special needs in current social concerns and issues. It is important, first of all to provide assistance and training to staff who will be writing the proposals. It is also important to be aware of the full scope of responsibilities which the school district administration may acquire once funding is granted. By READING the Request for Proposal from the grantor carefully and by working closely with the financial staff of the district, unpleasant surprises or unanticipated deadlines can be avoided. Since some funding sources require a continuation of projects with an increasing assumption of financial responsibility by the school district. financial provisions need to be anticipated BEFORE the proposal is completed.

To prevent unpleasant surprises. it is important for schools to be able to plan ahead and anticipate future consequences as well as benefits of receiving alternative funds.

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